

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 10-A

MIAMI HERALD
5 March 1985

Around the Americas

U.S., Honduras split over aid,

By ALFONSO CHARDY
Herald Washington Bureau

WASHINGTON — A year ago, U.S. influence had so overwhelmed Honduras that Reagan administration critics took to calling it the "USS Honduras."

But today, the ship is adrift and perhaps on a collision course with its one-time navigators.

Even the two main architects of the American presence there, Ambassador John Negroponte and Southern Command chief Gen. Paul Gorman, are jumping ship, Negroponte to a new assignment in Washington and Gorman to retirement as a gentleman farmer.

And while U.S. policy in Central America focuses on Nicaragua, a confrontation is unfolding between the United States and Honduras that could seriously affect the entire region.

The once-cozy alliance is threatened by Honduran demands for deeper U.S. commitments and increased military and economic aid. More serious for President Reagan is Honduras' increasing

dismay over the presence of anti-Sandinista rebels on its territory. While Reagan lobbies Congress for new aid to the rebels, the rebels' landlords are threatening to evict them.

The United States seems unwilling to satisfy Honduran demands, and while immediate concerns likely will be resolved, both sides sense that enduring resentment will make it difficult, if not impossible, to rebuild the relationship.

"The situation has been delicate and continues to be delicate between our two governments," said Moises Starkman, visiting Washington recently as a special envoy for Honduran President Roberto Suazo Cordova. "We are at a crossroads, a crucial moment."

U.S. officials are equally outspoken: "Some words, I would even say threats, have been exchanged," said one administration source. Another official accused Honduras of becoming "a foreign-aid junkie that aspires to be the Israel of Central America."

presence of contras

The once-sweet relationship between the two countries grew out of the close ties between Negroponte and Gorman and former armed forces commander Gen. Gustavo Alvarez, a staunch conservative.

From 1981 to 1983, Honduras allowed the Central Intelligence Agency to organize the anti-Sandinista rebels on Honduran soil and permitted the Pentagon to conduct military maneuvers that continue today.

Tensions arose last spring when nationalistic military officers, concluding that Suazo and Alvarez had given the United States too much of a free ride, ousted the military chief in a March 31 barracks coup and replaced him with the air force chief, Gen. Walter Lopez Reyes.

In September, Honduras suspended training of Salvadoran soldiers by U.S. military instructors at a Regional Military Training Center on Honduras' Caribbean coast. In October, Honduran Foreign Minister Edgardo Paz Barnica said his country had submitted new demands to the United States for more aid and a mutual security pact similar to one undertaken with South Korea.

Paz Barnica said he asked the administration to form a high-level negotiating commission consisting of Secretary of State George Shultz, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger and national security adviser Robert McFarlane. He said the administration indicated the panel would be created.

The commission never appeared,

however, and on Nov. 30, U.S. officials dismissed the demands as "unrealistic." A special Honduran delegation traveled to Washington seeking explanations and found none.

The Hondurans, angry at the U.S. nonresponse, publicly outlined an additional demand: Besides the security pact, they now wanted as much military and economic aid as neighbor and arch-rival El Salvador was getting.

This presentation was followed in December with another request that Washington resettle the rebels in the United States if Congress again rejects aid. U.S. military maneuvers have continued this year, but relations have continued to deteriorate.

In mid-January, McFarlane traveled to Honduras in a failed effort to resolve the dispute, reportedly walking out on a dinner with Lopez Reyes when the general refused to stop pressing him for firm commitments. Honduras deported one Nicaraguan rebel leader and warned it would get rid of

Continued

2

all rebel forces.

Talks continued in February, with progress reported in some areas. Paz Barnica said Honduras had retracted its demand for a security pact, but still sought written U.S. guarantees for protection against all attacks.

In Washington, Honduran envoy Starkman indicated progress in the training center talks, but Pentagon spokesman Michael Burch said that if Honduras does not agree to allow Salvadorans back by March 31, it will lose \$36.5 million for the facility.

Starkman said the biggest stumbling block, however, is Honduras' request for aid parity with El Salvador. In fiscal year 1986, he noted, Honduras will receive \$231.1 million in military and economic assistance, compared with El Salvador's \$483.4 million.

"The American administration did not consult with us on these amounts for 1986, and we consider them not to be sufficient for our needs."